

School District Redistricting Commission

June 6, 2006

Dear Arizona School and Education leaders:

School may be out for summer, but improving education for Arizona youth is never far from our minds. We thank you for sharing this thought with us.

While some classrooms may sit empty during the summer months, the Commissioners of the School District Redistricting Commission (SDRC) will be spending time in a high tech classroom to help us create our first attempt at unifying districts in the legislatively-enabled redistricting effort for our state all toward enhancing the education outcomes in Arizona. We would like to take this opportunity to tell you what we are about to engage in, what we have accomplished to date, and how you can continue to play a role in the work of the SDRC.

Background

During the 2005 Arizona Legislative Session, Senate Bill 1068 passed with bi-partisan support and signed by the Governor, established a 13-person School District Redistricting Commission. The Commission is charged to:

review all current common school districts that are not part of a unified school district and consider combining these common school districts into a new unified district or combining common school districts with a union high school district to create unified districts. . .

The legislation further states that the Commission's recommendations may include enlarging or diminishing the size of affected school districts but shall also include unorganized territories within recommended unified districts where practicable. The Commission may also determine that an existing common school district should remain a common school district and not be included in a new unified school district recommendation.

We would also like to highlight that the legislation requires the Commission to “consider the recommendations of the governing boards of the affected school districts,” and to consider recommendations of any and all stakeholders. To that end, this letter is one of many ways in which we are soliciting input.

Timeline

By April 30, 2007, the commission is to have drafted a preliminary report on the proposed school district redistricting plan. And by that same date, the preliminary report is to be submitted to the governing boards of the affected school districts.

By July 31, 2007, the Governing Boards of the affected school districts shall have reviewed the preliminary report and may submit comments to the Commission. The comments may include specific recommendations to modify the proposed unification plan and/or recommendations of one or more alternative redistricting plans.

By December 31, 2007, the Commission is to have considered the recommendations of the Governing Boards of the affected school districts and then is to have designed and submitted to the Governor a proposed school district redistricting plan.

Then finally, in November of 2008, each county school superintendent with a school district affected by the proposed school district redistricting plan shall call an election within the boundaries of the proposed unified school district to adopt the plan as proposed by the Commission.

(A full copy of the legislation is enclosed/attached for your review.)

Who we are

The School District Redistricting Commission is made up of a committed group of education, business and political leaders representative of diverse stakeholders from across Arizona:

- Ms. Vicki Anderson, retired teacher/school librarian
- Mr. Jay Blanchard, ASU College of Education, former state legislator
- Dr. Sandra Dowling, Maricopa County School Superintendent
- Ms. Doris Goodale, President, Kingman Unified School District (Mohave Co.)
- Mr. Art Harding, Arizona Department of Education
- Mr. Michael Hunter, Asst. Executive Director for Government Affairs – Arizona Board of Regents
- Ms. Rita Leyva, Chief Deputy, Yavapai County Education Service Agency
- Mr. George A. Martinez, Director of Institutional Advancement, Glendale Community College/Maricopa Community College District (Co-Chairman of the Commission)
- Mr. Dave Naugle, Corporate Public Affairs, Southwest Gas Corporation, governing board member, Sonoita Elementary School District #25"
- Mr. Thomas Schoaf, business owner, Litchfield Park, former board member of Litchfield Elementary School District (Litchfield Mayor-elect)
- Mr. Kent Scribner, Superintendent, Isaac School District
- Mr. Martin Shultz, VP Government Affairs, Pinnacle West Capital Corporation, former teacher and administrator (Chairman of Commission)
- Mr. Joseph Thomas, teacher, Mesa Unified School District

What we've done to date

Beginning in February 2005, the Commission began a series of regular meetings. During this time we have had a variety of presentations, including a review of existing education research, a review of how schools are funded, and a presentation from the Alhambra School District on its proposed plan for redistricting. The Commission has begun the process of determining what data is needed and how it can best be reviewed to help facilitate decisions. To that end, the Commission has held one of its meetings at the ASU Decision Theatre and plans to utilize this remarkable facility in the decision process.

In addition to the Commission meetings, and as required by the legislation, the Commission has hosted three public hearings to gain insight, feedback and ideas for the varying needs in different parts of Arizona, including a Prescott meeting in March, a Tucson meeting in April and a Phoenix meeting in May. Each session brought out a wide cross-section of individuals representing school districts, boards, individual schools, chambers and other entities. They came from very small school districts in rural areas and from large metro regions. Many shared their concerns, ideas and support. Some turned in materials to help bring to light the issues within their specific area. Still others stepped up to offer specific details for redistricting in their community. The Commission appreciates the input and is open for more.

These hearings have assisted the Commission in creating a list of criteria, encompassing those mandated by the statute, to consider in our decision-making process. This list is by no means complete or prioritized. It is merely a list of the variety of items that will be considered as we continue to follow our charge:

- Aligning curriculum K-12
- Administrative positions
- Governing boards
- Teacher salaries and schedules
- Instructional and non-instructional support services
- Travel time of students
- Budgeting
- Contractual obligations
- Capital debt
- Capital overrides previously accumulated
- Legal liability
- Acquisition of legal liabilities
- School district overrides
- New district names, numbers
- District geographic boundaries
- Enrollments
- Primary and secondary tax issues
- Potential for more effective use of facilities
- Political and municipal boundaries
- Tax rates
- Which schools students attend when they move from a common district to a high school district
- Career ladders
- Excess utilities expenditures
- Desegregation expenditures
- Student demographics
- English language learner percentage
- Small and/or isolated designation
- AIMS and AZ Learns designation
- Expenditure per pupil
- Percentage of special education students

What's next

The SRDC will meet at least twice over the summer utilizing ASU's Decision Theatre (<http://dt.asu.edu/>), a wonderful, high-tech facility that can help visually display extensive amounts of complex data in a variety of ways to help facilitate decision making. The Commission also plans to use the Decision Theatre to facilitate public access to information regarding proposals being considered by the Commission.

Get involved

As we have done from the beginning, and will continue to do, we invite you to give us your ideas relating to redistricting. You can attend the Commission meetings, e-mail, mail or call us with your thoughts. The dates of the Commission meetings will be posted on the SRDC web site found at www.Ade.az.gov/sdrc/. In addition, we invite you to share this update with your colleagues.

Thank you for your time and interest in school redistricting. We look forward to hearing your input and ideas.

Cordially,



Marty Shultz
Chairman, SRDC
VP of Government Affairs
Pinnacle West Capital Corporation



George A. Martinez
Co-Chairman, SRDC
Director of Institutional Advancement
Glendale Community College/Maricopa
Community College District

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